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a third is kept together in the middle,—by quotation. It is a very curious piece of joinery, and well worth the looking at.

These things afford entertainment; but when we reflect upon the manner in which he brings before those who attended his lectures, some of his old acquaintance and their friends, we feel nothing but disgust at him, and doubt of the true refinement of an age in which a polite and well educated audience would allow of such gross personalities. If Mr. Hazlitt is blind to the beauties of the living poets, it is of little consequence to them or to us, but we are offended at the vulgarity of the attack upon the characters of Wordsworth and Coleridge, nor does he rise in our estimation by seeking to make, out of the faults of Burns, a defence for licentiousness, and a rude attack upon a well principled man.

We hope that the English are not losing their reserve, and their reverence of domestic and individual privacy. Strangers who visit them may find it inconvenient, and coarse-minded people rail about it. It is connected with their best feelings, and when they become the mere creatures of society, they will put off that character which has made them respected.



ART. XII.—1. *La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri*. Firenze, 1813.

2. *The Vision, or Hell, Purgatory and Paradise of Dante Alighieri, translated by the Rev. H. F. Cary, A. M. in three volumes*, 1814.

IT is the fate of many of the Italian writers, to enjoy a reputation equally just and splendid in their own country, and to be comparatively little known to the rest of the world. Such has been more peculiarly the lot of Dante, one of the earliest, and if Italians are to judge, by far the greatest of them all. He has received for five centuries the title of Divine, is revered as the father of Tuscan poetry, and many of the most celebrated writers of that school have passed much of their lives in explaining his difficulties and extolling his beauties. Faults, if we may believe the greater part of them, he has none; and the more candid maintain the opin-

ion, expressed by Alfieri in one of his manuscripts, that more is learned from the defects of Dante, than from the beauties of others. With foreign nations, these high claims are not only unacknowledged, but derided. The inscription over the gate of hell, and the stories of Francesca of Rimini and Count Ugolino, are the only parts which have been generally admired ; the rest of the *Divine Comedy* is considered as owing the high character which it has acquired at home, to its obscurity only. Dante has been almost wholly neglected by the French, and though read by several of the English, is mentioned by none as he deserves, and by many with the most general and contemptuous censure. Lord Chesterfield has the candour or the assurance to state, that as he could not understand Dante, by great exertion, he did not believe him to be worth understanding. This we cannot but think is the real opinion of many foreigners ; while many more are deterred from the attempt by the bare reputation of the difficulty. This idea of the extreme obscurity of Dante is indeed founded, in some measure, in truth, but principally on the representations of the Italians themselves. The *Divine Comedy*, as Dante informs us more than once, is an allegory, and his commentators, as might be expected from the nature of the subject, have busied themselves partly in explaining, and partly in creating mysteries. After reading through some of the easier parts, and supposing ourselves in full possession of their meaning, we are told that the larger and better portion remains undiscovered, that the obscurity is the greater because we do not perceive that it exists, because there is not light enough to render the darkness visible. When the commentators have agreed that an explanation is necessary, each proceeds to give his own, and overthrow those of others. We were well acquainted with one now engaged in publishing his lucubrations, who has employed sixteen years solely on this subject, and possesses great natural abilities, and he has declared repeatedly that no person but himself ever completely understood Dante,—Petrarch and Boccaccio perhaps excepted.—It is indeed true, that the meaning of the allegory is too faintly disclosed to be discovered with certainty ; but why should this deter us from perusing the poem ? If we consider its interest heightened by looking beyond the literal meaning, the simplest, most concise, and most obvious interpretation seems in all respects to be the best. But the story

itself is more easy and more interesting, and in this, as in many other fables, it is rather a concern of commentators, than of readers, what mystical meaning we should affix, or whether any, to the simple narration. We read through Homer, and scarcely look at the expositions of the moral said to be involved in his machinery; and are fully satisfied with the pleasure derived from Virgil's description of Hell, without tracing with Warburton its relation to the Eleusinian mysteries, or perplexing ourselves with the insurmountable question respecting the gates of horn and ivory.

Our language possesses a production of a humbler kind, which bears in the character of its general allegory a strong resemblance to Dante's vision;—the *Pilgrim's Progress*. The complete interpretation of Bunyan's dream is a task, that has baffled the efforts of mature and cultivated minds, while the narrative is the delight of children, in the humblest classes of society. To understand Dante's work, as far as we understand these, requires no uncommon strength of intellect. If the difficulties, arising both from the vocabulary and construction of the Italian language, are greater in him than in the rest of his countrymen, they are so far removed by numerous and valuable annotations, as to exact only an ordinary degree of assiduity. It is surprising that this has not been devoted to him oftener.

Another reason why Dante is so little known to the English especially, is the want of a popular translator. Hoole's versions of Ariosto and Tasso, dissimilar as they are to their simple and concise originals, have contributed in no slight degree to render them objects of general attention, and consequently general admiration. It would be more difficult and more desirable to present Dante in a translation, which should be at once accurate, spirited and harmonious, and we find little that deserves this high praise in the only two we know,—those of Boyd and Cary. Boyd has been peculiarly unfortunate in the choice of his measure. We shall select one of his most successful efforts, both to prove our remark, and to represent, even in a humble imitation, the gloomy sublimity of the inscription over the gate of Hell,—a passage which in the original is equally unexampled and inimitable.

“Through me the newly-damned forever fleet
In ceaseless shoals to Pain's eternal seat:

Through me they march, and join the tortured crew ;
The mighty gulph offended Justice made,
Unbounded Power the strong foundation laid,
And Love, by Wisdom led, the limits drew.

Long ere the infant world arose to light
I found a being in the womb of night
Eldest of all—but things that ever last !
And I forever last !—Ye heirs of Hell,
Here bid at once your ling'ring hope farewell,
And mourn the moment of repentance past."

A poem so long, and yet so concise (we trust our meaning is evident) as the *Divine Comedy*, requires a style of verse, which can both awaken and support our interest, by its union of sententiousness, majesty and liveliness.

Our heroic rhyme seems adapted to this purpose, far better than any other kind of English measure, for one more rapid would be too gay, and one more grave would be fatiguing. The selection of so unwieldy a species of verse is one of the slightest defects of Boyd. He has failed to give it the harmony of which it is susceptible, and by a profusion of unmeaning epithets and useless circumlocutions, he has often obscured, and generally weakened the meaning of his author. Yet Dante is deeply interesting even in Boyd's version, though we should rather refer those, who are satisfied with reading him in English, to that of Cary. This we can pronounce with confidence, to be the most literal translation in poetry in our language. Not satisfied, however, with rendering the sense, he has copied in a great degree the construction of the original. He has forced our language into Italian idioms, with a license which outrages taste, and almost violates grammar. So close is his fidelity, as he probably thought it, that while he evinces a complete knowledge of his author, he occasionally transfuses into his version the difficulties as well as the beauties of the original ; and a few of the more obscure parts of the poem exact almost an equal degree of attention in the English and Italian. But if he has failed to explain with sufficient perspicuity some of the perplexing passages of Dante, he has succeeded in many more. As a mere assistant to the English reader, he deserves the greatest praise, and in doing justice to all the striking merits of the original, far excels Boyd. Cary's translation has a very

short preface and a few notes. Boyd's is preceded by some just but incomplete observations on the *Inferno*, but the merits of the *Purgatory* and *Paradise* are not formally noticed by either. As Dante's claims to our attention have been so inadequately represented and so hastily disallowed, we shall endeavour to state them faithfully, though imperfectly, in a few remarks; an attempt rendered excusable, if not necessary, by the neglect of English writers.

Dante Alighieri was born at Florence, of noble parents, in the year 1265. We learn from the poet himself, that he was inspired, at a very early period of life (in his ninth year say his commentators) with a passion for a lady named Beatrice, and both poet and commentators assert, that his affection was purely Platonic; a supposition much more probable at that age, than at one more advanced. This passion, however, continued several years without changing its character, and so great was the influence of the lady, the docility of the poet, and the genius of both, that he derived from his acquaintance with her the wisest and purest principles. His interesting guardian was removed by death, in the twenty-sixth year of her age. Notwithstanding the purely intellectual nature of Dante's affections, their vigour soon declined, when he was deprived of her visible and corporeal presence, and as he no longer felt her influence, he ceased to regard her lessons. His unsustained inclinations soon descended to objects of a sensual nature, and led him so far in vice as to endanger imminently his eternal happiness. Beatrice, now a heavenly spirit, still watched over the destinies of her wayward pupil, and admonished him of his increasing danger by mysterious suggestions, dreams and visions. Perceiving that these means were all ineffectual, she obtained permission, as a last resort, to exhibit to him the condition of disembodied spirits, the tortures of hell, the chastisements of purgatory, and the happiness of paradise. Such are the circumstances disclosed by Beatrice, in the thirtieth canto of *Purgatory*; for Dante commences, like most epic poets, in the midst of events, at the period to which we have just brought our readers. The vision is supposed to have happened in the thirty-fifth year of the poet's age, A. D. 1300, and to have occupied three days. The poem opens as follows.

‘ In the midway of this our mortal life,
I found me in a gloomy wood astray

Gone from the path direct and e'en to tell
It were no easy task, how savage wild
That forest, how robust and rough its growth,
Which to remember only my dismay
Renews, in bitterness not far from death.
How first I entered it I scarce can say,
Such sleepy dulness in that instant weighed
My senses down, when the true path I left;—
But when a mountain's foot I reached, where closed
The valley, that had pierced my heart with dread,
I looked aloft, and saw his shoulders broad
Already vested with that planet's beam
Who leads all wanderers safe through every way.'

On endeavouring to climb this eminence, his course is arrested by three wild beasts, a panther, a lion, and a wolf,—said by all his commentators to be images of sensuality, ambition and avarice,—who not only prevent his ascent, but pursue him into the valley. Here while flying breathless before them, he encounters a majestic figure and implores his aid. This personage announces himself to be Virgil, and after according his protection, discloses a divine commission, lately communicated to him by Beatrice, to exhibit to Dante the two inferior departments of the world of spirits,—hell and purgatory. In conformity with this command, he promises his guidance through those regions, adding that his own want of Christian faith had excluded him from Paradise, and that Beatrice herself would conduct her pupil there. Dante, after expressing a very natural diffidence, which is quickly relieved, consents to follow Virgil with implicit submission. After reading the sublime inscription already quoted, they immediately enter the gate of the infernal regions. Dante's hell, like Virgil's, is subterraneous. Its form is that of a hollow cone, the base placed at the surface of the earth, and the point at the centre; the interior is divided into circular ledges, and in these the damned are tortured by punishments of different kinds and degrees.

The indolent are not suffered to cross the river Styx, which here, as in the Eneid, forms a sort of interior boundary to the regions of woe. Dante assigns as a reason for this singular exclusion, that their lives were so inactive, so perfectly negative, that even a seat in hell would be too high an honour.

They are not however permitted to wander, like Virgil's souls of the unburied, in undisturbed sadness, but are driven along in a perpetual circuit, by the stings of wasps and hornets. Immediately beyond the river is the Limbo, which bears a strong resemblance in its scenery and inhabitants, to Virgil's Elysian fields. Here are the shades of the virtuous Pagans ; for Dante, with all Catholics, maintains that the want of the true faith, though resulting from blameless ignorance, is an insurmountable exclusion from eternal happiness. Virgil informs him, that here also were once confined the souls of the pious Antediluvians and Jews, but that our Saviour at his death entered this region in person and bore them off in triumph. The inhabitants of this part of the infernal world are exempted from all material tortures, and subjected to no other punishment than that of experiencing perpetual and unsatisfied desire. Dante proceeds to view, in the following circles, the pains inflicted on positive and premeditated offences. Here he has displayed his exhaustless invention, in the great number and strongly marked variety of his tortures, but more especially in the peculiar conformity of the punishments to the crimes. A distinct species of both is presented in almost every canto, but we shall illustrate our remark by slightly noticing a very few instances. The souls of incontinent lovers are hurried along in darkness, by an irresistible whirlwind, and those of suicides condemned to animate trees, and tortured by harpies who prey upon the foliage. Murderers are immersed in a torrent of boiling blood, and the heads of hypocrites concealed and weighed down by gilded cowls of lead. We find the degrees of guilt and punishment increasing as we descend, and the lowest circle is appropriated to traitors, who are inclosed in ice. At the bottom of hell, and in the centre of the earth, stands Lucifer.

After passing this point, the two poets ascend rapidly to the surface of the southern hemisphere, where they emerge into day. The Inferno is not merely a description of an ingenious variety of sufferers, tortures, and executioners. The poet seldom descends into a circle, without selecting and addressing some individual, generally of great celebrity, often one of his own countrymen ; and our thoughts are frequently called off from the sombre spectacle before us, by curious and interesting narrations, vehement invectives, and apt and novel similes. Sismondi has translated his story of Francesca of Rimini, and

that of Ugolino has been made known to the world by Sir Joshua Reynolds. We shall only mention in addition, the narrative of Ulysses, who informs Dante that he sailed through the pillars of Hercules, and discovered land beyond the Western ocean.*

On their return to the regions of light, Dante and Virgil find themselves, at early dawn, on a pyramidal island, and are immediately accosted by the shade of Cato Uticensis, who is removed, we know not why, from his Pagan brethren, and appointed governor of Purgatory.

The first canto contains a description equally remarkable for its intrinsic merits and its apt position. Nothing can be more soothing, than, after descending through the continually increasing horrors of the eternal prison, to revisit with the poets our native sphere, to breath the vital air, to contemplate again the dawn and the morning star, and gaze for the first time at the cross of the southern heavens and the majestic countenance of Cato, on which its beams are playing. With respect to its shape, Dante's Purgatory is best described by calling it his Hell reversed. It is a conical mountain;—transgressors are disposed in different circles round its sides, and its summit is crowned with the garden of Eden. Into this region those are admitted, who escaped eternal perdition by repentance previous to death. Through this the poet proceeds, and is no longer a mere spectator, as in the *Inferno*, but an actor in the scenes he describes. The seven deadly sins are inscribed on his forehead by an angel, and disappear one by one, as he rises through the different degrees of punishment, till he reaches the terrestrial paradise.

Here he sees a band of celestial personages, and these, after performing several solemn rites, are joined by Beatrice, who descends from heaven, like Thomson's spring, in a shower of roses. At the sight of her his passion revives in its greatest activity, and he turns round to ask the long tried assistance of Virgil, but finds that he has vanished. Beatrice orders Dante to direct his regret from the loss of his guide to his own offences; and after relating in his hearing to her heavenly companions, the history of his errors and her efforts, concludes by a direct and severe reproof, which extorts from the poet a heartfelt confession. His repentance is accepted, all

* Our readers will recollect that this poem was written nearly two hundred years before the discoveries of Columbus.

remembrance of his remitted offences washed away in Lethe, and his mind, like 'a plant clothed with new foliage,' is thoroughly renovated and prepared for paradise.

The Purgatory and Paradise of Dante are either wholly neglected by foreign commentators, or styled in general terms, fallings off from his *Inferno*. With respect to the Purgatory, this remark, if founded in truth, is much too unqualified. Though it may seem at first less novel and striking than the *Inferno*, it is, in our opinion, the part of all the three, which most invites, and best rewards a repeated perusal. There is something wearying and revolting in descriptions of the hopeless tortures of our fellow-creatures, which depends on our feelings of natural humanity,—feelings too deep to be suspended by all the art of the poet. Our attention can seldom dwell on such images long, and never with unmingled pleasure. It is one of the clearest and noblest proofs of Dante's merit, that in travelling through the *Inferno*, we feel this disadvantage no more ; but though it would be difficult to leave our journey unfinished, it would be unnatural to wish it longer. We contemplate, with far more calmness, the sufferings of the souls in Purgatory, because we can dwell on their sure prospects of future relief, because their punishments are of a milder and less degrading nature, and because the design is more evidently beneficent. The scenery, too, is more interesting than that of the *Inferno*, since it is more like our own, and the pathetic passages are introduced much less sparingly. There is indeed a spirit of tenderness running through every part of the Purgatory, which is deeply affecting, and shows that Dante's excellence by no means consisted solely in gloomy grandeur. So pleasing is it as a whole, that it is alike difficult to notice its defects, and select its beauties. We shall make no remarks in this place on the few faults it contains, as they are equally displayed in the two other divisions of the *Divine Comedy*. To beauties of the same kind with those of the *Inferno*, it adds many different in their nature, and equal if not superior in excellence. We have noticed already those of the first canto. The eighth opens with a description of Evening, equally natural and novel, and, in our opinion, unrivalled in simplicity and pathos by that of any writer whatever. In the tenth and twelfth he describes the figures carved on the rock, for the reproof of the proud, with a spirit and exactness as wonderful as that which he attributes to the artist. In the

thirtieth are collected many of the most important and interesting parts of the poem, the descent of Beatrice, the departure of Virgil, her affecting history of the poet's life previous to the commencement of his supernatural journey, and his holy veneration and sincere remorse are all displayed with such an union of simplicity and ornament, as to render this one of the most striking portions of the whole *Divine Comedy*.

In his *Paradise*, Dante has introduced the bold and unexampled idea of peopling the spheres of the solar system, with the spirits of the blest. He ascends to them with Beatrice, in the succession in which they are placed by the Ptolemaic theory. Each planet is filled with those, whose lives were peculiarly distinguished by the virtues over which it was supposed to preside; the Moon, for instance, with holy virgins,—Mars with warriors for the Christian faith,—Jupiter with upright judges,—Saturn with men of devout and lonely contemplation. After visiting all these, and passing through the '*Primum Mobile*,' Dante ascends to the *Empyrean*, and there concludes his poem. In the *Paradise*, taken as a whole, it must be acknowledged that the reader's expectations are greatly disappointed. It is the most difficult, and happily least interesting part of the *Divine Comedy*. The poet is perpetually stopping to ask questions in natural philosophy and metaphysics, which after all are solved much more to his satisfaction than that of his readers. He meets with all the saints of the old and new Testaments, and with many of the most distinguished worthies of the early ages, but seems more intent on rendering his dialogues profitable than interesting, and as scholastic theology was the favourite topic of his age, it is on this he mainly dwells. Dante's *Paradise* would probably have been far more pleasing, had his astronomy been more enlightened. The real nature of the heavenly bodies was then scarcely suspected. We can hardly conceive the description which one of Dante's powers would have given, had he been acquainted with their similarity, as habitable spheres, to our planet, and with the variety of their magnitudes, seasons, and satellites. That even he should have failed under these circumstances is not so surprising, as that succeeding poets should have made so little use of the interesting discoveries of modern astronomy. There are however parts of the *Paradise* distinguished by poetical merits of every kind, in which the author displays his unincumbered genius, and more than rewards us for his perplex-

ing and fruitless disputations. Such is the description of the triumph of the blest in the twenty-third canto, of which we shall select as many lines as our limits permit.

‘As in the calm full moon, when Trivia smiles
In peerless beauty, ‘mid th’ eternal nymphs
That deck through all its gulphs the blue profound,
In bright pre-eminence, so saw I there
O’er million lamps a sun, from whom all drew
Their radiance, as from ours the starry train.’

‘—————Prompt I heard
Her bidding, and encountered once again
The strife of aching vision. As erewhile
Through glance of sunlight, streamed through broken cloud,
Mine eyes a flower-besprinkled mead have seen,
Though veiled themselves in shade, so saw I there
Legions of splendours, on whom burning rays
Shed lightnings from above, yet saw I not
The fountain whence they flowed.’

Previous to any remark on Dante’s claims to our attention, we shall devote ourselves to a task more unpleasant, but more easy,—that of stating his principal defects. There is sometimes, though rarely, the same strange mixture of truth and fable, Pagan and Christian theology, with which the whole of the *Lusiad* is so deeply tingured. The early part of the poem presents us with one of the most glaring instances, in the doubt entertained of the truth of Virgil’s communications, because the high privilege which they announced had never been conferred on any, but Eneas and St. Paul. We have touched upon his fondness for the metaphysics of the schools, in our remarks on his *Paradise*, because it is displayed principally though not exclusively there.

His work is sometimes rendered obscure by the profusion and variety of his learning, and the concise phraseology into which it is crowded. We are told in reply by his admirers, that it is not he who is obscure, but we who are stupid and ignorant, that it is only a proof of the superiority of his talents and information over ours ; but we consider this as a repetition of the objection, in different terms. Authors are bound to display their knowledge intelligibly, or not at all. We look to them for information, and must be permitted to com-

plain, when we are told that if we were as wise as our masters, their lessons would be perfectly intelligible. We would ask how far in that case their instructions would be necessary or useful? For most of these general defects we may offer a brief and weighty apology,—that they were those of his time, and that they have been imitated by the most celebrated poets in more enlightened days. There are in the *Inferno* two short passages for which this excuse, were it true, would be insufficient. The punishment appropriated to flatterers, seducers, and parasites, at the end of the eighteenth canto, is too offensive to be described in any way whatever. This passage is indeed countenanced by translators and praised by commentators, but it is in vain to tell us, that it is as well expressed as the subject admits, that no punishment could be too degrading for such characters, and that no class of offenders deserved it better. Allowing these reasons all possible weight, we still maintain that Dante, in his detail of sufferings, should have considered not only what could be justly inflicted, but what could be decently told. We may object also to the vulgar incident related at the end of the twenty-first canto, and the jocular comment upon it with which the next commences; for the humour, which the lines really contain, is too low to render them tolerable, in a poem of much less solemnity and majesty. These passages excepted, the *Divine Comedy*, long and varied as it is, contains nothing offensive to the most refined ears. There is one well known habit of Dante, which we think an error merely because he has followed it too constantly,—the lightness, we may say the negligence, with which he introduces many of his most beautiful figures. He just points to their principal features, leaves the rest to our imagination and hurries onward. We complain, we think with reason, that he has so very unfrequently endeavoured to amplify his allusions; the more so because those rare attempts are always successful. Poets, as observed by Lucan, should present by turns the close and the open flower. The same genius which selected the figure, may sometimes be necessary to develop its latent beauties; and if it is a merit to be able to condense, it is a charm to be willing to display.

In attempting to do justice to the merits of Dante's poem, we should consider for a moment the age when it was composed. It was in the beginning of the fourteenth century,—before

any of the present languages of Europe were established, before our own poetry commenced with the rude and now obsolete strains of Chaucer,—that Dante presented the world with the first specimen of Tuscan, we may say of modern literature. It was then that he formed by his *Divine Comedy* a language, which his succeeding countrymen have gloried in preserving unaltered, to which foreign nations have united in resigning the palm for flexibility and harmony, and which divides with our own the claim to the highest reputation in European poetry. But if it is little considered that he was the earliest writer of any celebrity in the living languages, it is scarcely known, to strangers at least, how rich a source of ideas and expressions his work has proved to others. Many of the most admired passages in those Italian poets, whose celebrity is more general than his, are closely imitated, if not exactly transcribed from the *Divine Comedy*. Ariosto's idea of sending Astolpho to the moon is a natural and easy improvement of part of Dante's *Paradise*. No portion of the *Jerusalem Delivered* excites more interest than Tancred's adventures in the wood, which was peopled by the incantations of Armida; and yet after reading the account of that, in which Dante has lodged the souls of his suicides, we must allow that Tasso has little of his own except the style. It would be endless to repeat the many passages, which (though unacknowledged and unhonoured) he has furnished to the celebrated English writers, who had read him, and the many more derived from him indirectly by those who had not. For a large number of the most beautiful flowers of modern poetry, the credit is due to him as the first if not the only discoverer. As there are few from whom so much has been drawn, so there are few who have borrowed less.

The first and highest merit of a poet, originality, is apparent in every feature of his production, in its general plan, its narrative and didactic portions, its machinery and its allusions. But novelty, though the universal characteristic, is far from being the sole recommendation of the various efforts of his genius. Of his sublimity foreign critics have formed high but limited ideas. They have seen it principally in the *Inferno*, and finding it there, as it should be, dark and terrific, have concluded that Dante's genius, like Young's, was distinguished only by sombre energy. The study of his *Purga-*

tory and Paradise would convince them he could display a sublimity milder and more serene, that he could vary it with the nature of his subjects, dissimilar as they are. 'The dry-est and most hopeless are never without it long. Even in all the chaos of his most perplexed scholastic disputations, we are occasionally relieved and illuminated, by an idea equally true, novel and sublime.

'The sacred influence
Of light appears, and from the walls of heaven
Shoots far into the bosom of dim night
A glimmering dawn.'

Dante's tenderness, though, like his sublimity, all his own, sometimes reminds us of that of his adored Virgil. We perceive it in his narratives, his reflections and his discourses ; but in nothing more than in his figures. This is the merit, by which, if by any one more than another, his similes and allusions are distinguished. He was, like all the greatest poets, a close observer, warm admirer and lively describer of nature. No object was too latent or too insignificant for his notice. But he drew from this universal source with the originality of an elevated mind. He presents no cold and trite images of the daily operations and ordinary beauties of the material world ; his figures are either wholly original, or if he ever selects the more commonly observed objects, he develops some charm unknown before ; he gives them some striking personification, he annexes some circumstance calculated to touch the feelings, as well as enliven the fancy. A few examples will illustrate our meaning more concisely and completely than any thing else we can add. The following is so much more copious than most of his comparisons, that no previous explanation is necessary.

'In the year's early nonage, when the Sun
Tempers his tresses in Aquarius' urn,
And now towards equal day the night recedes ;
When as the frost upon the earth puts on
Her dazzling sister's image, but not long
Her milder sway endures, then riseth up
The village hind, whom fails his wint'ry store,
And looking out beholds the plain around
All whitened, then impatiently he smites
His thighs, and to his hut returning in

There paces to and fro, and wails his lot
 As a discomfited and helpless man.
 Then comes he forth again and feels new hope
 Spring in his bosom, finding e'en thus soon
 The world hath changed its countenance, grasps his crook
 And forth to pasture drives his little flock.
 So me my guide disheartened when I saw
 His troubled countenance, and so speedily
 That ill was cured.'—*Cary, Inf. C. 25.*

With what an appropriate and impressive aspect has he invested the morning star by a single line!

'About the hour,
 As I believe, when Venus from the east
 First lightened on the mountain, she whose orb
 Seems always glowing with the fire of love.'

Cary, Purg. C. 27.

We may observe his power of giving an unexpected interest to the most ordinary operations of nature, in his description of the reflection of the rays of heaven from earth;

They "upward rise
 E'en as a pilgrim bent on his return."—*Cary, Par. C. 1.*

How is the mind refreshed, after an incessant contemplation of supernatural objects, by the following rural images.

'———— As the goats
 That late have skipped and wantoned rapidly
 Upon the craggy cliffs, ere they had ta'en
 Their supper on the herbs, now silent lie
 And ruminate beneath the umbrage brown,
 While noonday rages and the goatherd leans
 Upon his staff, and leaning watches them.'

Cary, Purg. C. 27.

'E'en as the bird, who midst the leafy bower
 Has in her nest sat darkling through the night
 With her sweet brood, impatient to descry
 Their wished looks and to bring home their food,
 In the fond quest unconscious of her toil,
 She of the time prevenient, on the spray
 That overhangs their couch, with wakeful gaze
 Expects the sun; nor ever till the dawn
 Removeth from the east her eager ken;—

So stood the dame erect and bent her glance
Wistfully on that region.'—*Cary, Purg. C. 28.*

But it is his own species which furnishes to Dante his most animated and interesting figures. Their daily occupations, their domestic life, their very manners, amusements and dress, have all been made subservient to his ever wakeful genius. We shall commence our selections with two comparisons drawn from the latter sources, as most strongly illustrative of his comprehensive yet exact observation. The poet likens his own situation, when thronged in purgatory by a crowd of eager spirits, to that of a gambler when rising from the table.

' When from the game of dice men separate,
He, who hath lost, remains in sadness fixed,
Revolving in his mind what luckless throws
He cast ; but meanwhile all the company
Go with the other ; one before him runs
And one behind his mantle twitches, one
Fast by his side bids him remember him.
He stops not, and each one to whom his hand
Is stretched well knows he bids him stand aside,
And thus he from the press defends himself ;
E'en such was I in that close-crowding throng,
And turning so my face around to all
And promising, I 'scaped from it with pains.'

Cary, Purg. C. 6.

The following figures are introduced to illustrate the indistinctness of some of the airy phantoms of paradise.

' As from translucent and smooth glass or wave
Clear and unruffled, flowing not so deep
As that its bed is dark, the shape returns
So faint of our impictured lineaments,
That on white forehead set a pearl as strong
Comes to the eye,—such saw I many a face
All stretched to speak.'—*Cary, Par. C. 3.*

If he has the power of giving a new dignity to the most ordinary subjects, he has no less that of doing justice to the more important and interesting. With what accuracy and delicacy has he represented the finest feelings of the female heart !

‘ ——— My view
 Reverted to those lofty things, which came
 So slowly moving towards us, that the bride
 Would have outstripped them on her bridal day.’
Cary, Purg. C. 29.

‘ And as the unblemished dame, who in herself
 Secure from censure, yet at bare report
 Of other’s failing, shrinks with maiden fear
 So Beatrice in her semblance changed.’—*Id. Par. C. 27.*

To these descriptions of female modesty we may add the following of maternal tenderness.

‘ ——— Suddenly my guide
 Caught me, e’en as a mother that from sleep
 Is by the noise aroused and near her sees
 The climbing fires, who snatches up her babe
 And flies, ne’er pausing, careful more of him
 Than of herself, though but a single vest
 Clings round her limbs.’—*Id. Inf. C. 23.*

‘ After utterance of a piteous sigh,
 She towards me bent her eyes with such a look
 As on a frenzied child a mother casts.’—*Cary, Par. C. 1.*

But Dante’s favourite subjects of allusion are the simplicity, helplessness, and playfulness of infancy. Every one has admired in Goldsmith a figure of which the application only is original.

‘ ——— Towards Virgil I
 Turned me to leftward, panting like a babe
 That flies for refuge to his mother’s breast
 If aught have terrified or done him harm.’
Id. Purg. C. 30.

In the twenty-seventh *Purg.* Virgil conquers Dante’s unwillingness to proceed, by presenting to his mind the idea of his approaching meeting with Beatrice. Dante hesitates no longer on overcoming his transient waywardness, and Virgil

‘ ——— Smiles as one would smile
 Upon a child that eyes the fruit and yields.’

In the twenty-seventh *Par.* a portion of the heavenly host are represented under the form of celestial flames ;

‘ And like to babe that stretches forth its arms
For very eagerness toward the breast
After the milk is taken, so outstretched
Their wavy summits all the fervent band
Through zealous love to Mary.’

The last figure we shall quote not only serves to illustrate the tenderness of many of his images, but evinces his skill in comparing together objects of the most remote and opposite nature.

‘ ——— Heaven’s sphere that ever whirls
As restless as an infant in his play.’

Cary, Par. C. 15.

These extracts are, we think, sufficient to show that Dante’s reflections on nature are not those of one who studies her only in retirement and observes only her simplest forms.

But his knowledge of the human heart was not confined to the tenderer feelings. His remarks on sentiments of every species, whether made in his own person or those of the spirits to whom he listens, are so acute and profound as to prove that he had studied human life in its most refined, complicated and disguised state, and what is more, are so lively and confident as to shew that he spoke from experience as well as reason. As few possessed a mind like his, so few have enjoyed so largely the double advantage of contemplating mankind in solitude and society, or united in so eminent a degree the active and contemplative life. The nature of his work precludes him in a great measure from drawing particular human characters; but we may find proofs of his power in this respect, in the peculiar propriety of the speeches uttered by some of the most remarkable of his departed spirits. We refer as striking examples to those of Capaneus and Vanni Fucci in the fourteenth and twenty-fifth Cantos of the *Inferno*. We would rely still more on his occasional reflections, but above all, on his vehement and eloquent invectives, as proofs of his knowledge of the hearts of men and his power of communicating it to others. He possessed all that acute and discriminating satire so necessary to give effect to the observations of the most profound genius on the endless variety of human error. Where shall we find it exercised with a greater union of ingenuity and earnestness than in his address to the Popes in the nineteenth *Inferno*. the observa.

tions on Italy and more particularly on Florence in the sixth Purgatory (so highly extolled by Sismondi) and the contrast between the apostles and cardinals in the twenty-first Paradise?

To Dante is eminently due the credit, which Hayley gives so justly to Cowper, of the rare union of sublimity, pathos and wit. We know indeed that he possessed the latter, by a few humorous passages in the *Inferno*; but as we consider them misplaced in a poem like his, we had rather have remained ignorant of the fact, than have learned it from those sources only. But we are not obliged to resort to these. We find his wit elsewhere displayed as it should be, sometimes in direct reproof, but more frequently in that contemptuous and bitter irony, which adds new dignity to the most solemn and majestic eloquence. To natural powers, so great in number, so various in kind, so eminent in degree, to the highest proficiency in "the proper study of mankind," Dante united an extraordinary share of classical learning, and a freedom in that age no less extraordinary from classical pedantry. His work often displays his obligations to his predecessors, but always in a manner which diminishes nothing of his own credit; sometimes by beautiful allusions, sometimes by improvements on their ideas, which show a genius equal at least to theirs;—but never by tediously quoting or servilely imitating. He acknowledges in express terms the advantages he has derived from the perusal of their works. To Virgil, in particular, he attributes the style on which he rests his own reputation.

‘Glory and light of all the tuneful train,
May it avail me that I long with zeal
Have sought thy volume and with love immense
Have conned it o’er. My master thou and guide,
Thou he, from whom alone I have derived
That style which for its beauty into fame
Exalts me.’—*Cary, Inf. C. 1.*

Yet his work is so little a copy of the *Eneid*, that the merits of his thoughts and language, even when of the same general nature as those of his master, are varied from them by strong and original characteristics; and his defects are precisely those, from which Virgil is of all poets most exempt. Does not the example of Dante serve to show that the deep

study and warm admiration of the classics produces a servile imitation of them only in men of inferior understanding or perverted taste,—that an author of a great and properly cultivated mind will and must be original,—that they will assist and not encumber his genius, and that he will read them rather to avoid than repeat what has been said before? The purity of Dante's language is sufficiently proved by the circumstance, that in a poem of 13000 lines there are not more than two or three hundred obsolete words. For clear and majestic conciseness of style he was probably the model, and we believe his own countrymen think an unequalled one, to all the distinguished poets of Italy. We could speak highly from experience of the effect produced by the harmony of his work, notwithstanding its foreign language and novel measure, but will not dwell on points so obvious to the senses of every reader. Dante's production exhibits that union of mental and moral excellence too rare in the works of poets. Others have said that if their writings are licentious, their lives were chaste. We think that as far as respects society the offence would be much lighter, and the apology much more sufficient, could they say, as Dante might do, that if their lives were faulty, their verses are pure. In the *Divine Comedy*, as in the *Jerusalem Delivered*, there is not a single licentious passage. Its moral tendency is evident in every line. Its pictures of rewarded virtue are of the most animating nature, and it exhibits vice in the most discouraging situations, detected and punished, tortured in hopeless misery, or forgiven only after rigorous chastisement and bitter remorse. Yet his morality was pure without austerity, for how severely does he censure those who give way to causeless melancholy;—

‘ ———— Man can do violence
To himself and his own blessings, and for this,
He in the infernal world must aye deplore
With unavailing penitence his crime,
Whoe'er deprives himself of life and light,
In reckless lavishment his talent wastes,
Or sorrows there, where he should dwell in joy.’

Cary, Inf. C. 11.

Not satisfied with pursuing his end merely by directing our attention to the offences of others, he does not scruple to unveil his own. We not only accompany him in his travels

and listen to his precepts, but are the confidants of his errors. Few authors have excited an interest so deep for the characters of their heroes, as that with which Dante has inspired us for his own. He possesses a power, partly resulting from the varied excellencies which we have attempted to point out, and partly from a certain something, which we confess ourselves unable to describe, of producing in his readers the most undivided and unwearied attention. Even in the driest passages we are impelled to hurry on, but never induced to desist. We need say but little of a poem possessing a merit like this ; and instead of enforcing any longer Dante's claims to our attention, we have only to advise our readers to overcome the difficulty at first presented by the language, and they will enforce themselves.

Those of our own poets whom Dante most resembles are Shakspeare, Milton, and Cowper. With Shakspeare he was the poet of nature, with Milton that of the invisible world, with Cowper that of Christian morality. He reminds us sometimes of Shakspeare, by his insight into the human heart in the highest and humblest situations, by his beautiful allusions to the works of nature, and his power of presenting a crowd of ideas in a single word. His similarity to Cowper appears more frequently in the strain of his moral sentiment, now lofty and now tender, in the indignant satire of his reflections and harangues, and the uniform direction of it where it is best deserved. Milton resembles him so much more generally and strongly than any other English poet, that we shall conclude by a slight sketch of some of their principal points of likeness and contrast. Were other evidence wanting, the bare perusal of the two poems proves that Milton has largely imitated Dante. It is to Dante that the credit is due for the bold and novel sublimity of the general plan of both works, for which English critics, from a want either of knowledge or of candour, have combined in extolling their own countryman. It was Dante that first drew aside the starry curtain which surrounds us, and created definite regions worthy the sublime but mysterious ideas which Christianity had given us of the invisible world. In the description of the beings who people those realms, Milton has varied from all preceding poets by committing a capital error. We allude to that, so well developed by Johnson, of "perplexing^h his poetry with his philosophy, of making his infernal and celestial pow-

ers sometimes pure spirit and sometimes animated matter." With the exception of one or two instances of trifling inadvertence, Dante has avoided this difficulty by not attempting impossibilities. He has been satisfied with giving to the inhabitants of his triple kingdom, the qualities of airy phantoms, sufficiently material to possess a definite and unvarying form, and yet so unsubstantial as to elude the grasp of earthly objects.—

‘———On shadows vain,
Except in outward semblance ! thrice my hands
I clasped behind it, they as oft returned
Empty into my breast again.—*Cary, Purg. C. 2.*

By the time in which Milton has chosen to place the action of *Paradise Lost*, he has precluded himself from an advantage of which Dante well knew how to estimate the value. Milton has selected a period when the pages of history were a blank, and the realms of death a void, and his scenes of happiness and woe are destitute of the spirits so interesting above all others to mankind,—those of their departed fathers. The *Paradise Lost*, like the *Divine Comedy*, opens with a view of Hell, but Milton's description of punishments consists altogether in a few general, though beautiful passages, and its effects on the mind and heart are far feebler than those of Dante's narration. This possesses all the merits of Milton's, and adds to them a degree of copiousness and distinctness, which produces an impression both more violent and lasting. Of all the ingenious variety of Dante's punishments, Milton scarcely employs any, but those of darkness and fire ; but his fire is less intense, and his darkness less deep. Dante's hell is a terrific dungeon; every thing within it is made subservient solely to the purposes of torture ;—Milton's, a world diversified by many of the features, and stored with all the treasures of our own. Hence, instead of the shuddering horror which overpowers the whole soul at the view of Dante's representations, we contemplate the situation of Milton's demons with an undisturbed and not displeasing pensiveness. When we see them sitting in quiet consultation on the jewelled thrones of Pandemonium, repeating like the heroes in Virgil's *Elysium* their military exercises, employing themselves in retirement on those metaphysical perplexities so pleasing to some of the best of our own race, or listening to music of celestial origin, we

feel little inclined to dispute the opinion of Belial, that their situation might be altered greatly for the worse, or ridicule the hope of Mammon, that time and custom might render it more than tolerable. Dante's description of the prince of hell, as well as his kingdom, short as it is, is far more appropriate than Milton's. The Lucifer of the *Inferno* evinces his torture by speechless anguish, and his disposition by the most fiend-like actions. The poet has divested him of all that could excite even a doubtful admiration ; and if he has left him any thing of his former grandeur, it is only to increase our terror. He recalls to us his ancient splendour only to render him still more detestable.—

‘ ——— If he were beautiful
As he is hideous now, and yet did dare
To scowl upon his maker, well from him
Might all our misery flow.’

How often and how justly has Milton been censured for giving so frequently to Satan's character the semblance at least of heroism. If there is all that we abhor, there is much that we admire. Such is human nature that we cannot but respect the dignity with which he fills the throne even of hell, the readiness he constantly displays to be foremost to act and suffer for the advantage of his community, the lofty spirit which enables him to feel or to feign a hope in the most desperate circumstances. When he verifies his promises to his subjects by his journey to the newly created world, we contemplate with admiration his bold and novel enterprise, detestable as was its object and ruinous as were its effects. We are willing to excuse him from any imputation of meanness in the various disguises he assumes after reaching the sphere of day, for we look upon them as stratagems allowed by the customs of every species of warfare. When they are detected and exposed, we are strongly inclined to praise the courage worthy a better cause, with which he singly confronts Gabriel at the head of legions of Angels. Scarcely any part of *Paradise Lost* exceeds in poetical merit his account of his motives, condition and designs, contained in his address to the Sun ; but does its perusal inspire us with the unmingled detestation due to the great adversary of our race and our Maker ? This speech has been praised as containing no ideas derogatory to the Deity. His perfections are indeed stated justly, but this very circumstance greatly disarms our

indignation against an adversary who could acknowledge them so fairly. How are we inclined to forget Satan's malignity, when we find him displaying, with the most unsparing justice, his own ingratitude, disclosing the real feelings excited by the mistaken admiration of his associates, half resolved to seek pardon by submission, and deterred from it by a prevailing frailty of our own,—the dread of shame, and by a rational belief that his repentance could be but transient. It is only after being obliged to bid farewell to hope, that he forms the resolution of divesting himself of remorse, of placing his sole good in evil, and of achieving the destruction of unoffending man. He preserves every where the same gloomy greatness; he always elicits our pity and commands our respect in the character of an "Arch Angel ruined." He may well be compared to the Sun in a partial eclipse, shedding every where around him a light faded and solemn, but by no means terrific or baleful.

If we follow Milton to the celestial regions, we shall find that he was largely indebted to Dante for particular passages, as well as for the general plan of his heaven. In his account of the celestial hosts, he has followed him much less closely. Dante has not attempted in his *Paradise* the delineation of any particular angelic characters. His seraphs are not like Milton's,—images of men,—they are presented to us in a thousand varieties of form and degrees of distinctness. If his *Paradise* is destitute of any thing similar to the lively and well discriminated characters of Michael, Abdiel and Raphael, it is also free from the celestial battles and their concomitant absurdities, which fill the sixth book of *Paradise Lost*. Milton's descriptions of the Deity have a radical defect, which we think places them far below Dante's. An equal proportion of both poems is occupied by tedious metaphysical subtilties, but those of Dante are limited to inferior spirits, while those of Milton are appropriated to their sovereign. The Creator in *Paradise Lost*, explains his designs, justifies his proceedings and expresses his feelings, not always in the most dignified language. We grant that a part of these difficulties necessarily resulted from Milton's idea of giving us clearer and more definite conceptions of the Divinity; but we think the main error lies in the project itself. He has committed a fault similar to that of those Italian painters, who have represented the Eternal Father under a visible im-

age. Every one who has seen such pictures, will bear witness to their tendency to narrow and lower our ideas. To give to the Deity an earthly language, is an attempt nearly as perilous as to invest him with an earthly form. When he is made a definite object of perception to any of our senses, our thoughts lose in sublimity more than they gain in distinctness. The Supreme Being of Dante is rather a Power than a person; he is represented as pervading the 'whole ocean of existence;' he is described in no other manner than by the most distant allusion; we see his attributes only in his works, and hear his commands only through his ministers; he every where impresses us with that mysterious sublimity so appropriate to our most natural and noble ideas of an infinite being. If we except a few fine passages, Milton's peculiar excellence lies in his descriptions of the scenery and inhabitants of Eden. Every touch of his native earth seems to renew his vigour; it is here that he excels not only Dante, but every other poet. Dante's Eden,—*Paradiso Terrestre*,—has little terrestrial except the name. All things in it are allegorical, and we cannot but perceive that they are so. The soil is watered by rivers of a magic virtue, the atmosphere filled with supernatural splendor, we are surrounded by airy visions, and find the whole uninteresting in proportion as it is unearthly. Above all, it is destitute of the latest and highest charm of the Eden we have been accustomed to contemplate,—human love. Hence, Dante's description excites sensations far less lively and touching than those resulting from the perusal of Milton's, and as there is nothing to recall them in the world around us, their hold on the memory is comparatively transient.

'Thus in the sun-thaw is the snow unsealed,
Thus in the winds on flitting leaves was lost
The Sybil's sentence.'—*Cary, Par. 33.*

We find in Milton's Paradise all the natural beauties of our own earthly regions, in their highest excellence and most boundless variety; we breathe an atmosphere as pure as Dante's, but more substantial, and feel that we are roaming through a portion of our native home. Instead of the refined, vague and unintelligible affection of Dante for Beatrice, Milton presents us with the union of the hearts of our first parents in their orisons, labours and relaxations, developing

with equal simplicity and acuteness the mixed nature of that passion, which can be imagined and may be felt by every one,—displaying all that is intellectual, without obscurity, and all that is sensual, without grossness. Dante is the poet of our hours of sober contemplation. When we would escape for a season from the vexations of life, when we would relinquish awhile its pleasures and labours that we may resume them with renovated interest and unclouded judgment, we may accompany Dante through regions far beyond the sphere of all earthly objects and feelings. Milton's description merely of the inanimate and irrational charms of Paradise will render his memory as lasting as the beauty of rural scenery; and his name could scarcely be better known, or more certainly transmitted, were it engraved on every rock and inscribed on every flower. But he has fixed it far more deeply in human hearts, by his description of the passion which so generally sways them; and his Eden must interest all but the few, who can contemplate with insensibility, not only the charms of nature, but the happiness of domestic life.

ART. XIII. *Letters from Illinois by Morris Birkbeck, Author of "Notes on a Tour through France," and of "Notes on a Journey in America," &c.* 12mo. pp. 154. Philadelphia. M. Carey & Son. 1818.

THE author of these letters was lately an English farmer of considerable property, who being tired of the payment of poor-rates and taxes, quitted his native country, in search of liberty and a rich soil, in the Western parts of the United States. If we may trust his own account, he has not been disappointed in either object of his pursuit. His opinion of our Constitution is as high as the most inordinate national vanity could desire; whilst his account of the territory where he has settled seems almost to realize the dreams of the most enthusiastic emigrant. Mr. Birkbeck has gained no small reputation by his "Notes" of his tour from the sea-coast to the Illinois; and the present work, though not perhaps equal to the former, has considerable literary merit. He is a shrewd observer, and writes with great ease and vivacity. As to the correctness of the accounts—we will not say that the